MWRNet Supporting Deployed Servicemembers

By Jim Condon and Jim Scott

The first generation of the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) MWRNet Program was executed in September 2003 when the Combined Joint Task Force – 7 (CJTF-7) Commander approached the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center Charleston's European Office (SPAWAR Europe), in search of engineering, installation and program management of a large Internet Protocol (IP) voice and data satellite network. The network was to be used for Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) by servicemembers deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). At that time, no one knew how critical an asset this network would become.

Servicemembers and civilian contractors using the MWRNet at one of the 180 Internet Cafes in the Iraqi theater of operations.

Today, the SPAWAR MWRNet program supports 140,000 deployed forces from all Services supporting operations in Iraq, Kuwait and soon in Afghanistan. Each Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Marine deployed in the Iraqi theater may also wear the titles of mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, friend, student, business professional, etc., which reflect other responsibilities in addition to military service.

The MWRNet program provides facilities for servicemembers to access the Internet, send and receive e-mail, download content, access educational resources and make low-cost telephone calls around the globe. SPAWAR Europe delivers the speed-to-capability that the deployed Joint Warfighter demands. Our reputation has become the hallmark of SPAWAR operations in Europe and worldwide.

Over the last year, SPAWAR Europe thoroughly analyzed the program and designed the OIF Generation-II MWRNet to provide increased bandwidth, better network throughput, decreased latency, expanded user services and improved operations and maintenance. While much of the Gen-II network is not revolutionary in nature, the end result is an improved user experience at the nearly 180 nodes in the network. Perhaps one of the best results comes in the form of a significant reduction on the financial burden of the senior Department of Defense (DoD) command in Iraq, the Multinational Forces Iraq (MNF-I) and the increased benefits to the individual servicemember.

The Gen-II network provides double the bandwidth of the Gen-I network at a savings of several million dollars to the government. Deployed servicemembers, who average 14 million minutes of calling on the network per month, benefit from a 15 percent reduction in per-minute calling charges. That equates to an estimated $1.2 million in annual savings to servicemembers to stay in contact with the outside world.

The OIF MWRNet represents a new way of maintaining the weapons systems known as Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines, as well as the civilians who work beside them daily in hostile environments.

Our work in OIF is a breakthrough in operations in terms of providing technology to deployed forces in a way that sets the standard for operations of the future. MNF-I leadership recognizes the importance and value of taking care of the personal lives of its warriors and continues to invest in the tools to reduce the stress of servicemembers serving so far from home.

SPAWAR Europe is proud to be a vital part of such an important program supporting the Global War on Terror, and we will continue to upgrade the technologies involved while reducing costs to both the government and the servicemembers who benefit from the program.

Installation of a ruggedized antenna for the MWRNet upgrade.

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